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ABSTRACT

Noting that becoming familiar with the work system of the kindergarten classroom (a functional system with its own rules and procedures for activities and transition) is important for students' development and well-being, this study examined the work systems in two kindergarten classrooms and children's associated context-specific social competence. Participating in this followup study were 6 children from each classroom; the classrooms had been identified 5 years earlier as having different social participation structures. Data were collected by means of general observations, interviews with the teachers, and classroom observation of the 12 children over 3 days. The children were asked to "guide" a researcher through their classroom and to explain "how things go." In a game using a scale model of the classroom and dolls representing the teacher and the children, subjects were prompted to reconstruct the course of a school day's morning in the classroom and to play different roles in three different problem situations involving student behavior that would violate previously observed classroom rules and procedures. The findings indicated that the main classroom differences remained unchanged in 5 years. In one classroom, circle time was very structured, predictable, and easy to participate in, and had equal opportunities for all children regardless of their social competence. In the second classroom, participating in circle time required more effort from the children, but they seemed to receive more in return. The teacher took care to invite children who did not initiate participation. Changes in the social participation structure were observed to render more equal access. (Contains 12 references.) (KB)

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Classroom Management, Social Participation Structures and Required Social Competence in Kindergarten.

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Summary

This paper presents the results of an interpretive study of the work systems in two kindergarten classrooms and children's associated context specific social competence. An analysis is presented of the differences in prevailing rules and procedures, the children's knowledge of those classroom rules and procedures and the way children respond to classroom situations. Following more general observations that served to collect data to reconstruct the classroom work system, and an interview with both teachers, six children from each class were observed during three days. Afterwards each of these children was asked to "guide" a researcher through their classroom and to explain "how things go". In a game using a scale model of the classroom and little dolls representing the teacher and the children, they were prompted to reconstruct the course of a school day's morning in the classroom and to play different roles in three different "problem" situations involving student behavior that would violate previously observed classroom rules and procedures. The aim of the research was to investigate how children's classroom behavior is related to their context specific social knowledge and competence and how this interacts with the difficulty level of the classroom work system.

Introduction

This study builds on Doyle (1986)'s research on classroom management. Like in other social settings specific rules and social participation structures characterize life in classrooms. Knowing how to take your turn in class or knowing when and how to ask the teacher for help are competencies that children need to have in order to function satisfactorily in the classroom. And this applies to kindergarten (Cazden, 1986; Green & Harker, 1982; Corsaro, 1993).

Although there may be much similarity in prevailing rules and procedures, many differences can be observed between different classes. Even within one classroom what is considered as "good" or "correct" behavior may differ from one activity to another. So each classroom is characterized by its own "work system", i.e. a functional whole of activities each with their own rules and procedures and with rules and procedures of transition to the next activity (Doyle, 1986). Becoming familiar with this work system is important for students, not only from the viewpoint of their social development or their wellbeing, but also for their development in general, including their cognitive development. Erickson (1982) argued that two aspects can be distinguished in each classroom learning activity: the subject matter task structure, which refers to the content of the task and the social task structure, i.e. all the

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behavioral rules that should be observed while carrying out the task. Children who are more familiar with the classroom work system and the social task structures involved feel better "at home" in class, can spend more attention to the content of the task and gain more from the developmental opportunities offered by the school.

A lot of classroom rules remain implicit in spite of the time which is usually spent on explaining and explicitly teaching rules at the beginning of the school year. The existence of implicit rules becomes obvious when they are violated. Most often teachers would react in a way that reinforces the rule (Green & Harker, 1982). In many occasions implicit rules provide refinements or specifications of well-known explicit rules. For example raising your hand may not be "good enough" to attract the teacher's attention and to get permission to speak. Children may be required to pick out the "right moment" to raise their hand. In most occasions to know when the "right moment" has come children have to pay attention to specific nonverbal cues in the teacher's behavior. In the Green and Harker (1982) study of kindergarten classroom interaction, it was found that children gradually learn to detect such implicit rules and the cues they should pay attention to and become more effective in getting the teacher's attention.

Classroom work systems may differ quite a lot from each other, e.g. with respect to the order and types of activities involved, or the content of the rules and procedures. But they may also differ with regard to the complexity of the social participation structures associated with classroom activities, the predictability of transitions and the cues children can rely on to find their way in the complex classroom setting. This raises the question whether some work systems are "more difficult" for children to become familiar with and therefore make it harder for them to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the school, at least for socially less competent children. But, on the other hand, would making classroom work system more simple not create the risk of loosing opportunities to develop higher level competencies in children such as autonomy (self-steering) and social skills?

In an earlier study of the work systems in four kindergarten classrooms[1] it was found that differences in classroom work systems were associated with different social participation structures requiring different levels of social competence in children. However there seemed to be no clear relationship with the benefits a child could make in terms of getting access to the public forum, getting the teacher's attention or experiencing opportunities to learn or to develop social skills. Some work systems appeared to be more demanding without offering more opportunities to learn or to get attention, while others were more demanding and at the same time did offer more opportunities. One of the work systems was not complicated at all, but at the same time offered rather little opportunities for the children.
These findings are clearly illustrated by the details of the analyses made for two types of activities: (a) activities - such as circle time - in which children can share some of their experiences with the teacher and other students and (b) "playing and working in corners".[2]

Research questions

Following the study of the work systems in four kindergarten classroom a follow up study involving two of the four teachers was carried out five years later. Research questions for the present study are:

1. How will the work systems have evolved?
2. How different do children respond to the classroom work system and the demands involved?

[1] The earlier study was initiated five years ago by the same authors.
[2] See appendix A

3. How much do children differ in their capability / competence to reconstruct the work system in their classrooms and take the perspective of different persons involved?
4. Do differences in the way children respond to the classroom work system reflect differences in their capabilities to reconstruct the work systems in their classrooms and to take the perspective of different persons involved?
5. Do classroom work systems differ in the way or degree they compensate for differences in social competence in children?

Setting

Two kindergarten teachers and their classes were involved in this study. Both of them were involved in an earlier study in which the classroom work systems of four kindergarten classrooms were analyzed with regard to the social competence that was required from the children to participate adequately and the benefits or rewards children could gain (see appendix A).
Mrs. A's school is situated near the center of a little town about 20 km from the city of Ghent. Mrs. C's school is in the center of a small countryside village near that little town.
Mrs. A's class consists of 18 children, half of them being three years old and the other half being four years old. The study focuses on the four-year-olds. In Mrs. C's class there are 17 children, all of them being four years old. On the average children's SES is lower in Mrs. A's class, with more children from working class families wither lower educated parents. In Mrs. C's class most children are from middle class families with highly or rather highly educated parents.

Method

Following some general classroom observations the first author interviewed both teachers. At the start of the interview both teachers sorted little cards with their students' names on according to their perceptions of children's classroom behavior. Following this they were asked to comment on similarities and differences between children. The interviews focused on how well students understand classroom rules and procedures and behave accordingly as well as on students' social interaction during classroom activities. In addition some general information on the children's social background and general development was asked too.

Based on the information provided in the interviews six 4 year olds in each class were selected for the observational study. In the selection a wide diversity of students' behavioral characteristics was pursued. In March 2000 the selected students were observed for three days by the second author, who was not aware of the information given by the teachers during the interviews. Observations were focused to two types of activities: (a) circle time which is usually organized at the beginning of the day and (b) playing and working in corners, which is usually scheduled in two periods: one before and one after morning break.

In the same period each of the selected students was "interviewed" by a research assistant who was supervised by the first author. These children's interviews consisted of two parts.
In the first part each individual child was asked to guide the research assistant through his classroom, to show and tell about the different corners, and explain the meaning of the signs and pictures that were on the wall, the furniture or the blackboard. They were also asked to tell about "how things go in your class", i.e. to give a rough sketch of the daily sequence of activities and to explain the prevailing rules and procedures. This part took place during break periods when no other persons were present in the classroom.
In the second part of the "interview", taking place shortly after the first part at the same day, the child was asked to play "our class" using a scale model of its classroom and little dolls

representing the teacher and the children. In this scale model the child could easily recognize the classroom furniture arrangement with the different "corners" and the pictures and signs that are used in the actual classroom. At first all the different parts of the classroom scale model were shown to the children, referring to the "guided tour" in which the children acted as a guide for the research assistant. Then they were prompted to play entering the classroom, doing the first activity (usually circle time) and so on. The research assistant, who took the role of a child, using one of the dolls interrupted this enacted reconstruction of the daily sequence of activities several times. In doing so, several scenes were played. In each of these scenes the children were confronted with a situation that somehow disturbed the ongoing action. The children were asked to play the role of the teacher and/or one of the children involved in the situation (see appendix B). They were also asked to identify how each of the persons involved feels. For this four cards were used showing a child who feels (a) happy, (b) sad, (c) scared or (d) angry.

Results

Changes over time in classroom work systems

In our description of changes over time in the teachers' work system, we will focus on two types of activity: (a) circle time and (b) playing and working in corners. Both are organized during the morning session. Circle time-like activities usually take place at the start of the school day while playing and working in corners is usually organized somewhat later on, both before and after morning break. Circle time is usually preceded by daily routines such as writing down the names of the children who are present and routines that help children to develop a time concept (adjusting calendars, adjusting the day planner, etc.). For reasons that will become clear right away the way these routines are taken care of will be included in our description of circle time.
Compared with five years ago, little seemed to have changed in both teachers' work system. Still, some changes were observed.

In **teacher A's classroom** circle time appears to be more clearly marked. Five years ago there was no clearly marked activity that gave students the opportunity to tell something. Students who wanted to tell something had to take the initiative themselves. But teacher A appeared to purposely insert "empty moments" during the day to encourage such initiatives, e.g. while daily routines (such as adjusting the day calendar and the weather calendar) were carried out by the student who was on duty. Now teacher A appears to organize a more clearly marked circle time-like activity right after she has finished the daily administrative routines (writing down the names of the children who are present, doing the administration for meals and drinks, and so on). Circle time appears to consist of three phases: (1) some kindergartners start talking about a certain topic, the teacher listens and sometimes makes jokes with the children, (2) those children who raise their hands get the opportunity to tell their stories, the teacher listens and asks further questions, and (3) a few children – often those who don't take any initiative of their own – are invited to say something. Phase one and three are very similar to what existed in teacher A's work system five years ago. Phase two can be conceived as new, together with the more explicit organization of circle time. It is important to notice that teacher A keeps inserting empty moments during the day to give the kindergartners a lot of opportunities to tell something.

> *All children are sitting in the circle. Some of them shout: "Miss A, I have been… " Teacher A: "You have to wait. We first have to write down all the names." Kimberley raises her hand. Teacher A: "You can talk in a moment, Kimberley, but I will first write down the names." (…) All names are written down in the teacher's book. Jorik, Thibault, and Dante start talking about eating cake and getting fat. The teacher acts like she is very fat and asks Thibault what's his favorite cake. Some other children*

start participating in the cake discussion. Sometimes the teacher interrupts and asks the children to listen to each other. Marlies and Kimberley raise their hands. After a couple of minutes the teacher says: "Let's listen to those children who raise their hands." (Nodding to Marlies) "Marlies?" Marlies: "My mum will catch me up this afternoon and she will cook for me." Teacher A: "That's the way you like it, isn't it?" Marlies: "Yes, my mum is a good cook." Teacher A: "And it's so nice eating at home. You don't like eating at school, do you?" Marlies: "Not that much. (...)

The way the daily routines that precede circle time are taken care of appears to change rather irregularly. In the "normal procedure" the teacher would call each student's name one by one. When a child's name is called, the child gets up, walks to the board and turns his or her picture to indicate he / she is present. But on some occasions this procedure is subject to variation:

Observation 1
Teacher A and the children enter the classroom. The children look for a place in the circle. In the mean time the teacher puts some music instruments on the ground. Teacher A: "We'll do like we did it yesterday. When you hear your name, you play your name on the drum." (The children do not have to turn their pictures on the board.)

Mrs. A seems to be not aware of the confusion these kinds of variations may provoke in children:

Observation 2
(...) Teacher A: "We'll first write down the names." Thibault: "Who's allowed to turn the cards?" Teacher A (surprised): "We all do it. When you hear your name, you stand up and turn your card on the board."

Other routines (e.g. adjusting the calendars or the day planner) are not taken care of in a very systematic way. For example, the precise moment of the day may vary. The "arrow" that is supposed to indicate on a series of pictures (the day planner) which activity is actually going on, was frequently observed to point to a picture that does not correspond with the moment of the day.

With regard to the procedures and rules for playing and working in corners teacher A's work system didn't change. First the teacher lists all the work and play activities the children can choose from. By raising their hands children can indicate their first choice. For each type of activity there is a "corner" in the classroom. Going to the specific corner and putting one of the colored necklaces of that corner around one's neck indicates the choice one makes. There are only a limited number of necklaces in each corner. That number corresponds with the number of symbols (in the same color) on the wall or on a piece of furniture in the corner. Who cannot find a place (a necklace) in a corner has to choose another corner. Children can freely change corners after having tidied up the corner they leave and as long as they take care to change necklaces and do not exceed the limited number of children allowed in each corner. For some corners the number of children allowed is not indicated by the number of necklaces but by the number of chairs that are available.
In the interview teacher A explains that she considers the necklaces as a temporary material cue to help children decide by themselves whether or not they can enter a corner and participate in the ongoing activity, and to avoid conflicts about this. Usually, during the second term she would gradually take these necklaces away and after eastern holiday the whole work system would be run without using them. The children would then be expected to agree among themselves on who was first and can stay and who will have to wait some time. She says she stimulates the children to resolve conflicts by themselves as much as

possible. According to the teacher using these necklaces stimulates children to develop negotiation strategies. For example, children who want to enter a corner that is already fully occupied, would ask one of the children in the corner to warn them before leaving the corner and to exchange necklaces. Gradually they would learn to negotiate without actually exchanging necklaces. Because of the presence of three-years-olds in her class this school year, Mrs. A thinks she will have to continue with the necklaces system till the end of the third term.
Generally all ten corners are "open" during playing and working in corners. As she explained in the interview, Mrs. A would only "close" a particular corner after some incident that provoked her to intervene, e.g. when children did not tidy up the corner before leaving it, or when a row had arisen about who was allowed to enter the corner.
Children who are called by teacher A to come to work at the worktable have to leave their play corner immediately. At this point there is no room for negotiation. Apart from calling children to the work table, teacher A is observed to spend little time on organizing and managing things while children are playing and working in corners (e.g. managing transitions). Only a limited number of those kinds of teacher interventions were observed indeed. Instead she spends most of her time helping children at the worktable or participating in children's play in one of the play corners.

In **teacher C's classroom** procedures and rules for circle time didn't changed at all. In a fixed order, starting with the child sitting on the teacher's left-hand side, each child is asked whether he or she wants to tell something. As the kindergartners have a fixed place in the welcoming corner, which only changes a few times in a year, always the same kindergartner has to start. Sometimes the teacher would remind a child of something that happened or will happen and in doing so, encourage that child to speak. But she would seldom take the opportunity to explore the child's perspective or feelings. Instead circle time is run in a rather quick, mechanistic way which is reflected in the way children speak: at a great pace, often ending their "contribution" with *"And that's it!"* or *"And now I have finished"*. Daily routines (the calendars, the day planner) are taken care of in a very systematic day, at the same time of the day every day. Each day another child is on duty to execute these routines. Who is on duty is easy to remember, because the order corresponds with the children's seat in the circle. All this appeared to have not changed at all.

But with regard to playing and working in corners significant changes were noticed. Five years ago there were no material cues students could rely on for making transitions from one corner to another. At the beginning of the period the activities children could choose from were listed. Children who were not called by the teacher to come to work at the worktable could choose any of those activities. They could also change corner at any time. The main rule they had to observe was that the number of children in a corner should not exceed a pre-set limit. This limit varied among corners. Children were supposed to know what these limits were. There were no visual aids to help them remember. Also some children were observed to be rather successful in negotiating with the teacher about coming to the worktable or staying in their play corner a little longer. And the teacher spent most of her time watching and helping the children at the worktable, leaving the other ones on their own.
Sometimes some of the corners in Mrs. C's classroom are "closed" for some part of the day. Then the "entry – no entry" symbol (a circular shape with a green and red side hanging on a peace of string near the "entrance" of the corner) is turned red side in the front.

Because many children preferred the same corners and because it was difficult for the teacher to remember who had already played in which corner, the teacher decided to use a kind of mailbox system. For every corner there is a list on the wall with a removable symbol of every child and a mailbox for the symbols. When introducing the playing and working in corners period, agreement is reached on who is starting the period in which corner. To make this clear the child's symbol goes in that corner's mail box. If they want to play a next time

(e.g. the day after) in the same corner, they have to wait until all symbols are removed, i.e. until all children have played once in that corner.

> *Teacher C asks the children who wants to draw. Robbe, Michiel, Freya, and Arno raise their hands. Robbe and Freya take the pencils and put them on the table. When teacher C asks who wants to play in the 'hospital', seven children raise their hands (but only four are allowed in the hospital). Teacher C: "Let's have a look at the mailbox. Sara, Tim and Hannes are the only ones left, they can start playing in the hospital." The teacher takes all symbols out of the mailbox and put them back on the list. She takes one symbol (without looking at it) and points to Evelien. Teacher C: "Evelien, you're lucky, you can play in the hospital too." Evelien runs to the hospital.*

However, not only the teacher removes the symbols. The children themselves also frequently – but not always – use this procedure.

> *Sara: "Miss C, can I play at the sand table?" Teacher C: "Yes, I'll fix it right away." While the teacher is removing things covering the sand table, Sara runs to Quinten and asks whether he wants to play with her. Quinten agrees and says to the teacher that he will play at the sand table too. Sara goes to the sand table's mailbox and removes her and Quinten's symbol. Hannes – playing in the construction corner – notices this and says to Tim: "I'll play at the sand table too." Tim: "Why don't you stay with me? I want to build a tower." Hannes: " OK, I'll stay. Besides, I'm not allowed anymore." Eliah (also playing in the construction corner): "That's not true. You're allowed, you 're the turtle." Hannes removes his turtle symbol and runs to the sand table.*

This procedure is only used in the beginning of the morning. When children change corner in the course of the session, they don't have to put their symbol in the corresponding mailbox. The teacher explains she introduced this amendment to the basic rule because most children are not aware of the time. If they change corner just a few minutes before the end of the session, putting the symbol in the mailbox would prevent them from choosing that corner the next day and that would not be fair, she says. For some children this amendment to the basic rule seems to be rather confusing, moreover since there seems to be no fixed moment or rule for changing corners. From the observations it became clear that teacher C organizes a transition (changing corners) whenever she notices that some children are just walking around in the classroom without really engaging in an activity or when some children appear to be just waiting till someone leaves the corner they want to enter. This makes transitions within a "playing and working in corners" session very much dependent on the teacher and rather unpredictable.

> *Sara, Quinten, and Hannes are playing at the sand table. Laurens and Tim are watching them. The teacher asks the two boys to play somewhere else. They disappear but after a couple of minutes they are back at the sand table. The teacher: "We'll change, but only at the sand table. Laurens, Tim, and Arno, you can play at the sand table. The others can continue with their activity." Julie: "Miss C, I want to play at the sand table too." Teacher C: "But you can wait for a while, can't you, Julie?" Julie nods. Robbe and Michiel are quarrelling about who is allowed to play in the pharmacy. Michiel (who was playing in it): "Robbe, get off, only the sand table changed." Robbe: "But I want to play here." Michiel (pushing Robbe away): "Get off, we'll change after break." Robbe leaves.*

Later, it seemed that the mailbox procedure isn't used very strictly. When we arrived for the third observation, the symbols for the sand table were still at the same place as the week before.

In both classrooms the main characteristics of the work system remained the same. The changes that did occur tend to facilitate students' participation in classroom activities, either by making it easier to get access to the public forum (in the case of teacher A), or by facilitating student self-directed transitions during playing and working in corners (teacher C).

Children's reconstruction of the classroom work system

With regard to the *"guiding tour"* remarkable differences were noticed between students from Mrs. A's class and students from Mrs. C's class. All students from Mrs. C's class could reconstruct well the course of activities during morning sessions and the rules and procedures involved. They explained quite clearly the meaning of the pictures and signs that were on the walls, doors, and furniture. They showed the board on which all students had their cards with their own symbol (e.g. a turtle, a house, a tree,) on one side and their photograph on the other and explained that they had to turn their own card "symbol side visible" when entering the classroom and the other way round when leaving the classroom. They also showed the daily duties board with pictograms representing routine duties and children's symbols next to it, indicating who is on duty and what he or she has to do. They explained the different calendars (the weather calendar, the year calendar, and the week calendar) and how they are adjusted every day at the beginning of the morning session. They showed the day planner with the arrow pointing at one of the pictures representing the different activities in the course of a school day. They were also capable of explaining what kind of activity is done in each of the corners and how many children are allowed in each corner. The mailbox system appeared to be more difficult for children to explain.

The children from Mrs. A's class were also quite capable of explaining the different corners and the cues indicating the number of children allowed in each corner. At the time of the interviews in the doll's house the number of necklaces did not match the number of symbols indicating the number of children who are allowed in the corner. (Later on it became clear that one girl had forgotten to take off the missing necklace and had taken it home. She said she did not dare to tell the teacher about it, but would bring it back the day after.) Five children really counted the necklaces and got somewhat confused about how many children were allowed in the doll's house. In contrast to this one boy counted the colored symbols and said he was quite sure that one necklace must be missing.

Some of the children were less successful in explaining the meaning of the board with photographs and children's symbols (indicating who is present and who is not). For all of them, the daily duty board seemed to be very difficult to interpret. And it appeared also difficult for them to see the correspondence between the series of pictures of daily activities (coming to school, entering the classroom, having circle time, playing and working in corners, going to the toilet, drinking milk, etc.) and the time of day. At the moment of the interview the clothes-peg ("arrow" as they called it) was not at the right picture ("break time") but only a few children were able to interpret this lack of correspondence between the indicated picture and the real time of the day.

Contrary to what both teachers had expected all children were capable of interpreting well the classroom scale model. Some of them could even comment on specific details (e.g. details of the kitchen furniture in the dolls' corner) and point out some details the research assistant "had forgotten to draw" on the blocks that represented the classroom furniture.
When the classroom scale model was introduced and the children were invited to play "our class" Mrs. C's students were more hesitating to actually engage in the play. The interaction with the research assistant resembled more an interview situation in which the scale model and the dolls were used to illustrate or clarify situations and responses. The children from Mrs. A's class did not need much encouragement to play, on the contrary. This made it sometimes harder for the research assistant to focus on the scenes that were to be brought into the play to grasp children's understanding of classroom rules and procedures. However

in *playing with the classroom scale model* most children from both classes demonstrated being quite capable of reconstructing the course of activities in their classroom.
Children from Mrs. C's class seemed to be better in reconstructing the rules that were observed in the classroom, especially the rules for turn taking during circle time. Some of them could even name all the children one by one in the exact order of their turn. In contrast to this there seemed to be more confusion about the social participation structure of circle time in Mrs. A's class.
With regard to playing and working in corners, all except one of the children from Mrs. A's class made clear that when a child was called by the teacher to come to work at the work table there was no option but to leave the play corner and go to the work table. Responding to a scene in which a child who was called to come to the worktable tried to negotiate with the teacher, more diversity was found among Mrs. C's students. Children also differed in their response to the scene in which a child tries to persuade another child to change corners.

When asked to identify the feelings of the different persons involved in a certain scene that was played using the classroom scale model, most children from Mrs. A's class responded very quickly and adequately. This was much less the case for children from Mrs. C's class.

Differences in children's classroom behavior

In this section we will discuss differences in children's classroom behavior as observed during classroom observation and in comparison with the teacher's observations and impressions. We will try to relate differences in children's classroom behavior to differences in (context specific) social competence on the one hand and differences in classroom work systems on the other.

With regard to children's classroom behavior Mrs. A distinguishes between five subgroups. The first subgroup consists of four children who usually stay in the background. According to Mrs. A they feel well in school but they sometimes seem not to understand classroom procedures. Only one of the four-year-olds belongs to this subgroup. The second subgroup consists of four children (all of them three years old) who participate quite well in classroom activities without taking the lead or stepping in the limelight. The children of the third subgroup, with four four-years-olds and one three-years-old child are described by the teacher as *"those who always do what I tell them to do. They observe classroom rules very well."* Two four year old boys who are described as little troublemakers, rather self-centered children who might slap other children and a four year old girl often complaining about other children constitute a fourth group. Finally there is a subgroup of three children (two of them four years old) who are described as ringleaders, who would make other children listen to them, always trying to be the first or trying to get the teacher's attention. They would also try out how far they can go in violating classroom rules.
According to the teacher *Hanne*[3] belongs to the third subgroup. The teacher describes her as very socially competent, with a better understanding of other persons and a better understanding of rules and procedures than the other children. And very industrious too, working long on assignments, trying to do it perfect.
Teacher A was often observed to ask Hanne for some help, not only for administrative tasks, but also for some more complicated games. Hanne fulfills these tasks always very correctly.

[3] For reasons of privacy all children's names have been changed. Because in Flanders children's given names often reflect their parents' social background (English names becoming popular from television shows are more frequently found in low SES families), we took care to use names similar to the original ones.

> *Teacher A starts singing a dipping rhyme. The child that has been touched the last one, gets some make up on his face. Teacher A: "Hanne, you are the teacher. You have to touch the children." All children are singing the dipping rhyme. Hanne is walking around. The children touched by Hanne go to the teacher who puts some make up on their faces and change them into a clown, an Indian…*

When playing with the classroom scale model and the dolls Hanne mentioned several rules that we had not observed in the classroom.

> *Int.: "What do you do when all of you are sitting down?"*
> *H: "We play, but first we have circle time."*
> *Int.: "You first have circle time. Who's allowed to start talking?"*
> *H: "Someone who is sitting next to miss A. There are two of them."* [Unobserved rule]
> *Int.: "Can everybody say something during circle time?"*
> *H: "No, some time ago three of them could, now four of them can."* [Unobserved rule]

Different from what Hanne claimed to be the rule we observed about ten children telling something during circle time. But it may be possible that after some time teacher A forgets or drops some of the rules she introduced earlier in the school year. We're inclined to believe what Hanne said because teacher A was sometimes observed to recall rules that never had been observed before.

> *Teacher A and the children are playing a little game in circle time. Hanne and Marlies are sitting next to her. Hanne is first asked to play the game. Then teacher A says: "Marlies, you are sitting next to me, it's your turn."*

This could also explain why the children often fight to sit on one of the chairs next to the teacher's one when they enter the classroom.

Jana is also considered as one of the children who understand the rules well and behave accordingly. *"But she's a very quiet pupil. You never know what she is thinking."* Just like Hanne she works very long on her assignments, trying to make it perfect.
Jana seems to be the second help of the teacher, but only for routine tasks. Jana was often observed to help Hanne when she has to fetch some materials in other classrooms, when the classroom has to been cleaned very quickly… The teacher sees these two girls as exceeding the other children. E.g. only Hanne and Jana are allowed to play educational games at the computer.

Debbie and Lana are two girls who are trying to be the helping hands of teacher A too, but this doesn't work. Debbie participates very obviously in all activities. She's very enthusiastic, but has difficulties to control herself. She often shouts the answers, pushes other children away… The teacher describes Debbie as one of the ringleaders.

> *Jana and Marlies ask teacher A to play at the sand table. Teacher A: "No problem, but you'll have to remove the plate." The two girls go to the plate and try to remove it. Jana: "There's some sand on it." Marlies: "I'll clean it first." Debbie runs to the sand table and starts pushing the plate (while Jana was holding it). Jana pushes Debbie away and says that she will do it. Teacher A (friendly): "Ghijselinkske (Debbie's surname), you may help, but take care." Debbie is holding the plate at the other side of Jana. Jana: "Ghijselinkske, you can push."*

When playing and working in corners, Lana often seeks for activities guided by the teacher. She also tries to help Hanne and Jana when they are asked to do something, but teacher A often prohibits this. The teacher explains that she does this because Lana is too much spoiled by her mother.

> *Teacher A: "Hanne, can you ask Miss P. for some golden tapes?" Hanne stands up. Teacher A: "Jana, you can join her." Jana and Lana stand up. Teacher A: "Lana, are you Hanne? I suppose not. Sit down." Hanne and Jana leave the classroom, Lana is sitting down. (...) Teacher A: "Hanne, will you please get some paper chains?" Hanne gets some and give it to the teacher. Teacher A: "Will you please help me with decorating the classroom?" Hanne takes some paper chains. Lana is taking some too. Teacher A: "Lana, will you please sit down. Hanne can do this on her own."*

According to the teacher Lana complains quite a lot about the other children and is not well accepted by them.

Jorik is a boy who has little contact with the other children and plays most of the time on his own (e.g. the book corner is one of his favorite corners). However, most of the time he is an active child who is observed to change corner frequently and who appears to be fully aware of the rules and procedures concerning these changes.

> *Jorik, Bryan, Gianni, and Quinten run to the sand table. Bryan, Gianni, and Quinten take a necklace and put it around their necks. Bryan: "Jorik, you'll have to leave, there are only three necklaces, so only three kids are allowed at the sand table." Jorik: "You're wrong. There's one necklace missing. We're allowed to play with four. Look." Jorik counts the four stars that are painted on the wall next to the sand table. Bryan: "All right." Very soon, Quinten puts his necklace back at the hook on the wall and goes to the construction corner. Jorik notices this and takes the necklace immediately. After a couple of minutes he leaves for the book corner but keeps the necklace hanging around his neck. For approximately five minutes he is busy looking in a book. Then he goes back to the sand table where Mohamed is playing (without a wearing a necklace). Jorik puts the necklace around Mohamed's neck and goes to the computer corner where Hanne and Jana are sitting.*

When it was Jorik's turn to guide the research assistant through the classroom (with no other children present) he kept on running from one corner to another. However his explanations of classroom rules were indeed very adequate.
Teacher A is very concerned about Jorik's development. E.g. his paintings are not the paintings of a *normal* 4-5-year old boy. Mrs. A mentions that he can also be very aggressive towards the other children who try to avoid him more and more. This was observed only once. While playing with the classroom scale model Jorik was the only child who played that a child hurt another one (and was punished by the teacher for doing so). Teacher A doesn't know very well how she has to handle with Jorik.

> *The children have been painting. The teacher and the children are sitting together and the teacher shows the different paintings. For every painting she asks the children who made it. The teacher shows Jorik's painting. Tatjana: "Bah, it's like the painting of a little child." Jorik: "It's a donkey." The teacher looks at me but says nothing. Jorik: "I painted a donkey." Teacher A (to me): "I don't know what to say."*

According to the teacher Kimberley is a child (the only one in class) with a low self-esteem. She is one of the inconspicuous children who do not always seem to understand what is going on. The observations confirmed that she does not participate very much. In circle time she participates but she does this in a very quiet way. She would not start talking without raising her hand to ask for permission (see excerpt above). When the children are playing and working in corners, she walks around in the classroom and hardly engages in an activity for more then a few minutes.

For the children in Mrs. A's class there was much correspondence between data we retrieved from three different sources: the teacher interview, classroom observations and the individual children's interviews (guiding tour and playing with the classroom scale model).

When discussing differences among students with regard to their classroom behavior Mrs. C distinguishes between three subgroups. Six children are described as *"quiet, rather dependent, participating well but need to be stimulated by the teacher"*, six as "very spontaneous and participating with much enthusiasm in all kinds of activities". The five children of the third subgroup would cause some trouble from time to time, e.g. taking something away from another child, pushing other children, etc.

Robbe is described by his teacher as a very intelligent boy. According to Mrs. C other children often ask him to help them when they have to do a difficult assignment, e.g. when it is their turn to adjust the calendars. He is one of the children of the second subgroup, the children who participate with great enthusiasm. He often volunteers to come to the worktable first, before going to play. In the play corners he often takes the lead. He is one of the children who need not be remembered of the tasks he has to do when he is on duty (e.g. to adjust the calendars).
All of this has been confirmed in the classroom observations. Robbe appeared to be one of the three boys whose presence in the classroom is very prominent. They all participate very actively in all activities. However Robbe can be seen as the one who's most appreciated by the teacher because he often creates interesting opportunities giving intelligent remarks.

> *The teacher asks Michiel to arrange the calendar. Robbe: "Michiel, you have to remove two sheets." Teacher C: "Why, Robbe ?" Robbe: "Because yesterday we did not come to school." Teacher C: "Did you all hear what Robbe said ? We have to remove two sheets because there was no school yesterday."*

Teacher C often makes it clear to Robbe that she expects him to be a diligent pupil.

> *Robbe is making a puzzle of level 1. Teacher C: "Robbe, isn't that too easy for you ? I'm sure you can make a more difficult one." Robbe fixes very quickly his puzzle, stands up and takes a puzzle of level 2. He sits down, stands up, puts the level 2 puzzle away and takes a puzzle of level 3.*

Quinten is described by the teacher as a very quiet boy, not very popular with the other children (e.g. he would be the last one they would choose to be their partner in a game or a dance), less developed than the other ones at the start of the school year (e.g. could not identify colors by their names), never volunteering to be the first one to go the worktable.
The observations confirmed the picture of a very quiet child who often has difficulties to function adequately in the classroom. It seems that he has little knowledge of the rules and procedures. He often needs help, not only from the teacher but also from the other children. Sometimes he works or plays intensively, but most of the time he walks around looking for an activity.

> *Quinten finished the Quips Game. He leaves his table and goes to the 'hospital'. The four hospital children send him away. Robbe: "Sorry sir Quinten, we're already four. You can't play here." Quinten goes to the Nijntjes Game where Fauve, Maxime and Eliah are playing together." Teacher C: "You'll have to wait for a while, Quinten, they just started a new game." Quinten keeps looking for a moment. Then he goes to Martijn and Arno who are playing firemen. Quinten takes a fire car too and drives it twice from one corner to another. Very soon, he leaves the firemen corner and asks the teacher: "I want to play in the hospital." Teacher C: "That's impossible, Quinten, there are already four children. Why don't you make a nice painting?" Quinten: "I want to play the Quips Game." Teacher C: "But you played it five minutes ago." Quinten takes a paper and starts painting.*

When guiding the research assistant through the classroom, Quinten could explain quite well how the different calendars are adjusted every day and what is meant by the symbols on the routine duties board. However he could not remember who's turn it was to adjust the

calendars. It also appeared that the meaning of mailboxes was not clear for him and he was not adequate in interpreting the symbols at the entrance of each corner showing how much children are allowed in each corner at the same time.

Hannes is a boy who's rather an inconspicuous figure in the classroom. He's sometimes a little bit shy towards teacher C (e.g. he hardly participates during circle time), but has a lot of contact with the other children when they are working or playing in corners. These observations confirm only partly what the teacher told about him. She considers Hannes as one of the children who gets in conflict with other children from time to time (third subgroup), most of all with his favourite play mate.
Sara often acts like she forgets the classroom rules and procedures, e.g. when entering the classroom, she always 'forget' to turn her picture. After a couple of seconds, she turns back and says something like '*Sara, you stupid girl.*' Sara doesn't seem to be very clever, but she's quite good in interpreting social cues (see also example of the mailbox).

> *Robbe is playing in the pharmacy but nobody comes to buy something. He goes several times to the hospital and asks to pass by the pharmacy. Nobody reacts. Robbe sits down in the corner of the pharmacy. Sara is passing by and asks: "How do you call this thing again ?" Robbe: "Pharmacy." Sara runs to the hospital and shouts: "You have to go to the hospital. Robbe has to play on his own." Nobody reacts. Sara: "I suppose they won't come. I will buy something."*

The teacher describes Sara is a very dependent girl, who does not take much initiative and stays near her most of the time. According to the teacher Sara is not very popular with the other children. She and Quinten, who is not very popular either, then turn to each other. Sara's linguistic development is somewhat behind to the other children. She complains quite often to be tired (the teacher thinks she lacks sleep) and tries to postpone doing assignments at the worktable very often.

Althought the teacher describes him as one of the children belonging to the second subgroup of children participating with great enthusiasm, from our observations Eliah appeared to be a rather inconspicuous child. Most of the time he doesn't participate at all at circle time, but when he gets the oppurtunity to play he always chooses his corner or activity very quickly. If possible, he will keep on playing in the choosen corner for a long time.

> *Eliah has been playing in the construction corner before break (ca. 30 minutes). Upon entering the classroom, he runs to the construction corner again. After a couple of minutes the teacher passes by. Mrs. C: "Ah, Eliah, still playing with your airoplane ?" Eliah says nothing but keeps playing. Quinten: "Eliah, would you like to play with the firemen with me ?" Eliah: "No, I don't like that. I want to play with my airoplane."*

During whole class activities Fauve is a rather quiet girl. In small groups however she can be very dominating.

> *Michiel and Quinten are quarrelling in the dolls corner. Fauve is passing by. Fauve: "Don't quarrel. You'd better play together." (...) A few moments later, Charlotte says to Fauve that she wants to play in the dolls corner. Fauve: "That's impossible now, can't you see? They are already four. You'll have to wait until break."*

This corresponds with some of the teacher's observations. The teacher describes her as a girl who concentrates very much on the assignment they have to do, working long and taking care of many details, often complaining about *"to much noise around her"*.

Comparing Mrs. C's description of the children with our own observations some dissimilarities were found.

Discussion

Both classroom work systems have evolved in the course of five years, but the main differences between both classroom work systems remained unchanged. In one classroom circle time is very much structured, very much predictable, easy to participate in and with strictly equal opportunities for all children whatever their social competence is, but with rather little return for the children in terms of teacher response that would deepen or broaden the children's input. In the other classroom the social participation structure of circle time is less clear. Participating in circle time appears to require more effort from the part of the children, but they seem to get more in return too. Although this less clear and more demanding social participation structure tends to favor the more socially competent children, the eventually resulting inequality of opportunities is lessened by the teacher because she takes care to invite children who do not take initiatives of their own. In this classroom changes in the social participation structure were observed in the direction of a more structured activity rendering more equal access. At the same time the teacher was able to keep the return for the children at the same high and rich level as before. However in contrast with the first teacher daily routines are taken care of less systematically, causing confusion in the children.

With regard to working and playing in corners changes were observed in the first classroom. A mailbox system was introduced to help children to make their own choices without getting in conflict with each other. However this system does not appear to be used in a very consequent way, causing confusion with some children from time to time. In the second classroom the apparently efficient and effective system that was used to manage minor transitions in the course of working and playing in corners remained unchanged

In both classes differences in how children respond to the classroom work system and the demands were obvious from the descriptions both teachers provided as well as from the independently collected observational data. Both types of data corresponded rather well. Most of the descriptions given by the teacher appear to be confirmed by our classroom observations.
Differences between students were also obvious from their responses in both activities that were designed to investigate their understanding of classroom routines, procedures, and rules and the cues, symbols and devices involved. However, differences in children's classroom behavior were not always clearly reflected in their reconstruction of the classroom work system. For example, differences in the adequacy of the explanations children gave about the different calendars in the classroom and things like the routine duties board seem to correspond more with differences between both work systems than with differences in children's individual social competence. But general differences in children's cognitive development – so far not accounted for – may complicate interpretation of the data. Further analyses of the details of children's reconstruction of their classroom work systems may clarify some of the differences that remain clouded so far.

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APPENDIX A

Results from a previous study, involving the same teachers

In a previous study, 5 years before the present one four kindergarten teachers were involved. Among them were teachers A en C.

In two classes opportunities for sharing one's own experience with others were provided by the teacher explicitly and structurally during daily circle time. In both other classes children had to create a time slot for this by their own initiative. But this difference did not account much for the differences that were found with regard to the accessibility of the public forum, the required social competence to get access, the support children were given to get access or the probability that a child's initiative to tell something would be rewarded by the teacher's attention or active listening.

So in one class (teacher C) it was observed that little effort or social competence was expected from the students to take part in circle time. It just came to each student's turn in a set order. The beginning and the end of circle time were clearly marked. The course of the activity was very much predictable and the rules very clear. Therefore the social participation structure was very transparent for students and easy to become familiar with. However since telling something seldom resulted in a teacher response that would deepen or broaden the student's experience or expressed views or would otherwise be rewarding or stimulating there seemed to be not much to gain from actively taking part in circle time.

This was also the case with teacher E who would also organize a well-marked whole class group discussion every day. But to take part the kindergartners of teacher E had to show more initiative and skills; "in a correct way" they would have to draw the attention of the previous speaker, who would be empowered to indicate the next speaker. What was considered as "correct" was only partly made explicit. So children with less social skills would run the risk of participating less - although the teacher's interventions sometimes would help them.

Both teachers A and S did not organize a 'circle time'-like activity. However with teacher A the public forum seemed to be a lot more accessible for students as she would deliberately create time slots for children who wanted to tell something or share some experience. Still the children had to discover themselves the cues indicating that time was likely to be provided for any initiative of their part. Essentially they also had to take the initiative themselves. Yet teacher A would sometimes increase the accessibility of the public forum for some children by inviting them explicitly to tell something, using her knowledge about their lives. The stimulating and rewarding way in which teacher A would react to the children's stories would be most likely to reinforce children's initiatives and therefore would further enhance the accessibility of the teacher and the public forum.

In contrast with this, teacher S would leave little room for student initiatives and would not give a stimulating reaction whenever a kindergartner succeeded in creating time for his own story on his own initiative.

During "playing and working in corners" the class group is divided in smaller subgroups, each of them being involved in another activity in one of the "corners": the dolls' corner, the books' corner, the blocks' corner, etc. Usually one of the corners is the worktable at which a specific assignment is carried out: making a drawing or painting, etc.

With regard to playing and working in corners the work system of teacher S was certainly the most transparent one. From the beginning of the school year students were divided in fixed groups. Allocation to one of the corners and transition to another corner were completely regulated by the teacher in a fluent and efficient way, using clear signs. But there was no freedom of choice and no opportunity for negotiation.

Teacher A's work system allowed some freedom of choice. Yet it could be called very transparent. Choice of a corner and limitations (numbers of kids allowed within a corner) were materialized. For some corners this was done with limited numbers of differently colored necklaces that students had to put on when entering a corner. In other corners the

number of chairs indicated the number of children allowed. The explicit nature of the rules and procedures for allocation of corners to students and transition to another corner also contributed to the transparency of the work system. Consequently the teacher seldom had to intervene and children were observed to negotiate with each other. Comparing the way teacher A organized playing and working in corners with the way teacher S did, we could notice a higher complexity of the associated social participation structure along with more frequent opportunities for the development of self-steering in children.
The way playing and working in corners was organized by the other two teachers (C and E), was associated with a lot more confusion in children. With teacher C the students had to wait during the initial allocation. If not called upon they could choose a play corner by themselves. Once this initial allocation was done, children were free to change corner as long as they observed certain rules (e.g. on the number of children allowed in each corner). However no material cues were provided to help them with this. In the process of changing corners teacher C was often observed to intervene and decide by herself what corner a child was going in to. It was also observed that children were allowed to negotiate with the teacher when they were called to come to the worktable. These features of Mrs. C's way of working made it possible for the socially more competent children to bend rules and procedures to their will. At the same time it made this activity's social participation structure less clear and predictable for the other children.
Teacher E was more explicit here: the choice whether to work or play was completely left to the children. But the choices concerning the play corners had to be confirmed by the teacher. The rules applied by the teacher remained implicit. Therefore we can suppose that self-steering was developed less than with teacher A.
With regard to the supervision of the activities the most important difference was that two teachers (A and E) did not only supervise working at the worktable but also playing in the play corners. The importance of this for the development of self-steering in children became clear from observation of what happened if the teacher only paid attention to the work table and not to play corners. With teacher S it was repeatedly observed that less socially skilled students "got lost".

APPENDIX B
Scenes and roles used in the "our class" game

While the child is reconstructing the sequence of activities in the classroom, playing with the dolls and the scale model of his classroom, the following scenes are introduced by the researcher:
(a) a child interrupts the one who is speaking during circle time (or speaks before his turn),
(b) a child playing in one of the play corners is called by the teacher to come to the worktable but answers that he prefers to go on playing and will come somewhat later,
(c) a child at the worktable has finished his work and calls the teacher to ask what to do next,
(d) a child wants to enter a play corner without having regular access (according to the prevailing rules),
(e) a child who wants to enter a play corner but has no regular access starts negotiating with one of the children who is in the play corner for some time already.

At the moment situation (a) is introduced the child is usually playing the role of a child who is telling a story (most probably the child is playing his own role). Next the child is asked to take the role of the teacher. In situation (b) and (c) the child is also asked to take the role of the teacher once the situation has been introduced. In situation (d) the child is subsequently asked to play the role of (d1) one of the children who already are in the corner and (d2) the teacher. After scene (e) has been introduced the child is asked to play the role of the child who wants to enter the play corner and starts negotiations with one of the other children.

Classroom Management, Social Participation Structures, and Required Social Competence in Kindergarten

Paper presented at the 81st AERA-meeting New Orleans 2000

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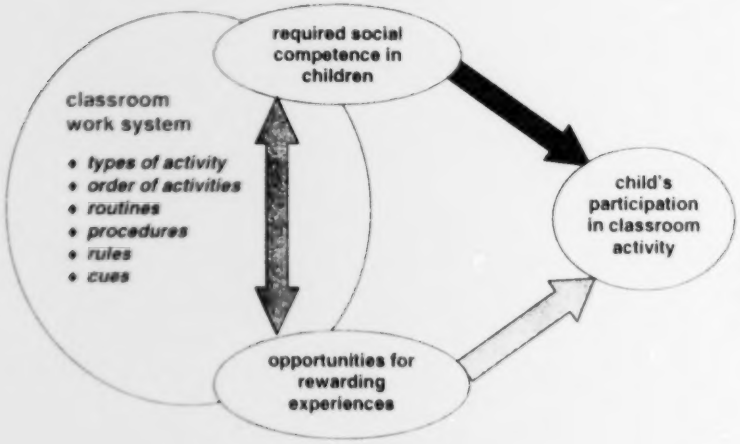

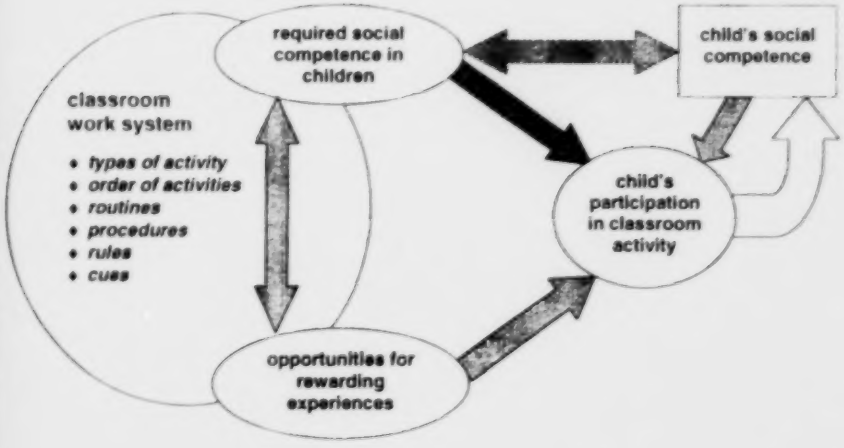

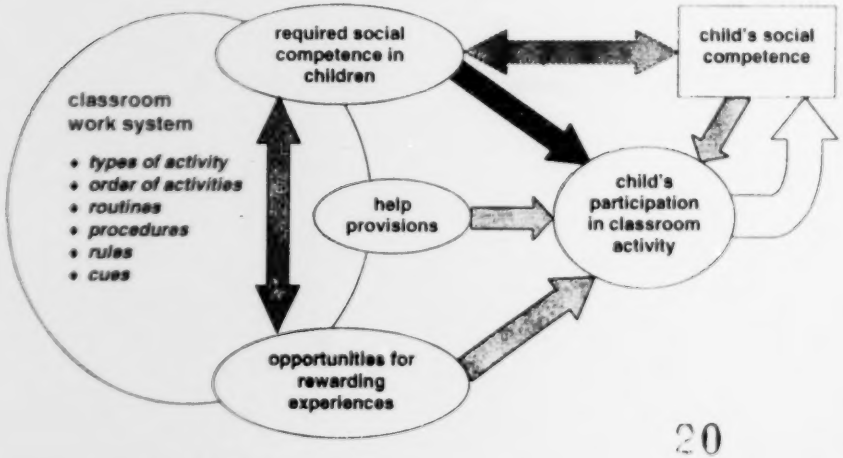

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STUDY # 1

- 4 Kindergarten teachers (children age 4)
- focus on *circle time* and *working and playing in corners*
- different work systems ⇒ different social participation structures ⇒ differences in required social comptence ⇒ opportunities for rewarding experiences

STUDY # 2

Research questions:

1. evolution in work systems?
2. differences in children's responses to WS (and ⇒ demands) ?
3. differences in children's reconstruction of WS?
4. child's classroom behavior ⇒ ? ⇒ child's reconstruction of WS
5. influence of help provisions on children's behavior?

STUDY # 2

Setting: Two Kindergarten classrooms

Method:
1. general observations
2. interview with teachers → selection of 2 x 6 students
3. observations focusing on ⟶
4. individual interviews of 2 x 6 students
   - *"guided tour" through the classroom*
   - *playing "Our class" using a scale model of the classroom*

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STUDY # 2 - RESULTS

WS - characteristics and evolutions for *circle time*

Mrs. Ann	Mrs. Caroline
• more clearly marked, but routines vague	• very clearly marked, clear routines
• 3 phases: *informal talk* *volunteers talk* *non-volunteers are invited*	• turn taking in fixed order *according to sitting place, very predictable,* *some children are invited to speak*
• 'empty moments' = room for initiative	• rather mechanistic
• very much rewarding for students	• not much rewarding: *"And that's it!"*